



focus on **NRM** research

Water and woodland birds on cotton farms

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What are you researching?

This project is investigating water bird communities on cotton storages in the Gwydir and Namoi Valleys. This project will provide information on the use of water storages by water bird populations with links to habitat and management.

What have you found?

Storages incorporating a range of habitats (e.g. shallow water and vegetation) tend to have a more diverse bird community and often a greater number of birds than storages without a range of habitats.

However, relatively high numbers of waterbirds can occur on storages without diverse habitat, reflecting the mobile nature of these birds. Many waterbird species have been recorded so far during surveys, with species of note including occasionally recordings of broilgas, magpie geese and freckled ducks.

Why is it important?

Well-managed, good condition and biodiverse ecosystems provide a range of benefits (ecosystem services) to growers and the wider community. Many of the birds found on cotton farms are insectivorous and provide natural pest control services to growers. Birds are charismatic and provide a good barometer of ecosystem health. Healthy bird communities on farm can help growers demonstrate good environmental management credentials and environmental stewardship.

How can I apply the research/what should I do about it?

The presence of waterbirds on farms is linked to the ability of growers to maintain water in their storages. Even quite shallow areas of water can provide foraging habitat.

Different waterbird species are attracted to different habitats, and being mobile they will tend to respond to any changes, moving between favourable sites.

Vegetation that increases waterbird habitat in and around storages includes live and dead trees, marsh plants, edge plants (reeds), and floating and underwater plants.

Birds can also be attracted to algae and mud flats. Fish-eating birds will be attracted to the presence of their prey, and many waterbird species require a minimum area and depth of open water to be present. Bird habitat in storages is very dynamic in response to how storages are managed. Waterbird diversity and abundance will be assisted by the maintenance and diversity of habitats that the storages can provide.

Where do I go for more information?

There are many ID guides available for birds, including the 'Birds on Cotton Farms' booklet, downloadable from the CottonInfo website:

www.cottoninfo.com.au/publications

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